

CASEBOOK OF IDG IMPLEMENTATION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

Lund University and the Inner Development Goals: From individual engagement to global ripple effects

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Abstract

At Lund University (LU), we are increasingly working with linking inner and outer transformation and the inner development goals (IDGs) for accelerating sustainability across different disciplines, departments and levels. Related work started around ten years ago with the establishment of the Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program, which involves research, education, impact and outreach activities. The latter also involved active engagement with the processes and organisations that led to the creation of the IDGs in 2020. Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies (LUCSUS) became a founding member of the initiative, and LUCSUS Professor Christine Wamsler has been acting as a senior scientific advisor to the initiative since its very beginning. Over time, LU has increased its engagement in linking inner and outer transformation, and nurturing transformative capacities through the following fields and activities: i) undergraduate and postgraduate education (targeted courses and seminar series), ii) student career services, iii) staff capacity development, iv) strategic collaboration within and outside the university, v) the working environment and wellbeing, vi) scientific knowledge development, and vii) large-scale networking, outreach and impact work for advancing education, research and practice in the field. In this paper we present related activities and ripple effects within LU and beyond, with worldwide impacts. We reflect on the drivers, outcomes, and processes that advance the systematic consideration and institutionalisation of inner dimensions of sustainability and the IDGs, supporting shifts in discourses, paradigms and associated action-taking, from which other institutions can learn.

Keywords/key phrases: Inner transformation, inner transition, existential sustainability, existential resilience, transformative learning, paradigm shift, culture change

1. Introduction

In 2026, Lund University (LU) was ranked the world's best university in the field of sustainability by the QS World University Rankings. This recognition also reflects LU's growing efforts to integrate inner and outer transformation for sustainability including the Inner Development Goals (IDGs)—across various disciplines, departments, and institutional levels. In the following sections, we present LU as a case study to explain how this work has evolved and what activities it encompasses.

Our case study illustrates the diverse processes that support the incremental integration and institutionalisation of inner dimensions and IDGs, fostering shifts in discourses, paradigms, and associated action-taking, from which other institutions can learn and find ways to actively

engage in this area. It was developed through a co-creative process of writing and reflection that involved all the initiators of the initiatives presented.

2. Starting Point

Targeted work around the intersection between personal inner development, mindsets, culture and systems change for accelerating sustainability started around ten years ago with the establishment of the Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program at Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies (LUCSUS). LUCSUS is part of the Faculty of Social Sciences, one of nine faculties at LU. It is a world-class, interdisciplinary centre for research, teaching, and societal impact.

The Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program encompasses research, education, impact, and outreach activities, and has played a significant role in shaping the emerging field of inner transformation for sustainability. The latest reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022a,b) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, 2024) reference the Program's scientific work and publications and provide the following summary of the field:

“Inner transformation for sustainability is an emergent field of research, education and practice (Ives et al., 2023). The aim is to support integrative approaches that link inner and outer dimensions of transformation across sectors and levels to, consequently, enhance individual, collective and planetary wellbeing, regeneration and flourishing (Ives et al., 2023; Wamsler et al., 2021). Inner dimensions are defined as individual and collective mindsets, beliefs, values, worldviews and associated inner capacities/qualities (cognitive, emotional, relational) (ibid). The concept recognises that inner and outer dimensions are never separate but are co-created (ibid). On this basis, inner transformation involves changes in the sphere of human inner dimensions and refers to all kinds of actions at individual, collective and system levels that support integrative changes in views, structures and practices, which address the impacts, drivers and causes of today's polycrisis (...) Related research, practice and education recognise: (...) the possibility to generate inner, transformative capacities/qualities through intentional practices” (IPBES, 2024, Annex to Chapter 3).

These transformative capacities are, in some contexts, also referred to as IDGs. The impact and outreach activities of the Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program have also included active engagement with the processes and organisations that led to the creation of the IDGs in 2020. LUCSUS Professor Christine Wamsler has served as a senior scientific advisor to the initiative since its inception, and LUCSUS is a founding member.

3. Undergraduate and Postgraduate Education

3.3.1. Sustainability and Inner Transformation

The educational activities of the Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program led, amongst other things, to the development of the “Sustainability and Inner Transformation” course, which was formally launched in 2018. The course forms part of the Master's Program “Environmental

Studies and Sustainability Science” (LUMES) offered by LUCSUS, and it runs annually over a period of three months.

The course was developed over a two-year period; activities included experimenting with new approaches to learning for sustainability, their empirical validation, and the creation of a better scientific foundation through targeted research on inner transformation for sustainability. Related work started in early 2015, when five students worked in close cooperation with Professor Wamsler on the design of an Experimental Learning Lab, which ran between 2015 and 2016. The aim was to explore contemplative approaches in sustainability teaching and learning and assess their value and potential with a view to making them an integral part of the curriculum. An evaluation showed that a majority of students welcomed the integration of contemplative approaches into the Master’s Program, and that they had a positive influence on their learning (Wamsler, Hertog et al., 2022; Wamsler, 2019, 2020). Scientific studies conducted under the Program provided support for further development (see Section 7).

The overall purpose of the “Sustainability and Inner Transformation” course is to develop a critical understanding of the potential role of inner dimensions and inner transformation for sustainability. Three guiding questions were defined to help guide related learning:

1. Why is it important to consider inner dimensions in sustainability? (Existing rationales, related theories, concepts, disciplines and fields).
2. What is the potential influence of inner dimensions and inner transformation on sustainability outcomes at different scales? (Existing influences at personal, collective, organisational and system levels, related case studies, theories, concepts, disciplines, and fields).
3. How are the identified rationales and influences reflected in current sustainability research, education and practice? (Concrete activities and gaps).

The course includes a series of lectures and seminars that are intended to explore the role of inner dimensions and their potential to support sustainability. Knowledge from sustainability science, social neuroscience, psychology, behavioural economics, contemplative studies, art and aesthetics, and transformation theories are systematically integrated in the form of lectures and seminars.

Self-reflection and enquiry are supported by a Practice Lab, which includes continuous in-class and home practice. The Practice Lab is intended to be an unconventional classroom component. It disrupts the traditional model of teaching and learning in the hope of offering something that is more transformative for both students and teachers. The exercises build upon each other, progressing from individual to social and environmental dimensions. They include contemplative practices, values and visioning exercises, worldview journeys, and time walks, drawing on diverse fields and sources such as the IDG Toolbox; apps recommended by Student Health Centers (e.g., Headspace, the Mindfulness Daily Program); transformational leadership approaches (Sharma, 2018); the *Education for Sustainable Consumption through Mindfulness Manual* (Fritzsche et al. 2018); Joanna Macy’s *The Work That Reconnects* (Macy & Brown, 2014); and teaching manuals that address a range of issues, including climate anxiety (Lewis et al., 2024; Mehlmann et al., 2025).

In addition, the course includes so-called *Councils*. Based on the council methodology, sessions are conducted in a circle with a focus on deep listening and understanding, creating a space for sharing theoretical and personal insights, experiences and feelings in a way that allows participants to be fully present, and learn from each other.

3.3.2. Psychology and Climate Change

In 2022, LU created a new undergraduate course to explore inner dimensions, and nurture transformative capacities for accelerating climate action, sustainability and transformation. Financed by LU funds for lifelong learning, the Lund University Department of Psychology and LUCSUS jointly developed a new interdisciplinary course on “Psychology and Climate Change”.

The course explores the ways our changing climate affects individuals and groups, including climate distress and its consequences, the psychological and behavioural factors that can drive the climate crisis, and the theories and practices that can support skilful action across individual, collective and system levels. It bridges knowledge, theories and approaches from the fields of psychology and sustainability to integrate inner and outer transformation.

Based on the learnings gained from the “Sustainability and Inner Transformation” course, it includes not only a variety of lectures and seminars, but also a continuous Practice Lab. A novel feature is the “Reflection and action paper”, which involves regular journaling for self-reflection, as well as the development, implementation and description of a concrete activity. Students are asked to describe how they plan to translate their learnings into a concrete activity that has the potential to support inner and outer change, by addressing mindsets, behaviour, culture and system transformation in combination. Whilst they are free to use and combine different theories, approaches and tools presented during the course, many have, in the past, used the IDG framework to guide their activities.

The new, experimental approach taken by the “Sustainability and Inner Transformation” course and the “Psychology and Climate Change” program has received increasing interest from both internal and external stakeholders, leading, amongst other things, to increasing student enrolment and a front-page article in one of Sweden’s most popular newspapers (Lagercrantz & Uddenfeldt, 2023).

3.3.3. Living the Sustainability Idea

In 2023, the LU School of Economics and Management (LUSEM) also launched a course on inner transformation and the IDGs titled “Living the Sustainability Idea” (LSI). LUSEM is one of the nine faculties within LU, it focuses on education and research in business administration, business law, economic history, economics, informatics, and statistics.

The course is a voluntary extracurricular track for students enrolled in the Masters’ Programs in “Management” and “International Strategic Management”, and it is designed for students who wish to strengthen their inner capacities and develop sustainable leadership skills. Recognizing student interest in developing a “sustainability profile,” the Program Directors supported the creation of the LSI course.

The course is structured around the IDG framework, and runs over two semesters, with a maximum of 25 participants. The overall purpose is to prepare students for the future labour

market, equip them to manage change, and drive sustainable development. The focus is on experiential learning, enabling students to practice self-reflection and to both identify and actively cultivate relevant inner capacities. The expected learning outcomes are to:

1. Support students in anchoring themselves in their values to find their own motivation and way of engaging with sustainability.
2. Prepare them for a future job market in which they will have to address change and uncertainty and be able to drive change on an organisational level.
3. Demonstrate that they can translate the sustainability idea into reality by “living it” for a week, and document related lessons regarding both individual and organisational/strategic levels.

Participants are provided with tools drawn from the IDG Toolbox and other sources to practice and enhance their inner capacities, both individually and through group exercises, reflection, company visits and personal coaching. They are also given access to resources such as articles, reports and recordings that present relevant topics. Furthermore, they are asked to apply inner development in practice. This takes the form of a 7-day challenge that requires them to adopt more sustainable behaviours. This might involve altering a daily habit, engaging in sustainability-promoting activities, or mobilising others by creating awareness and engagement. Examples from past courses include hosting dinners that bring together people who do not usually associate with each other, preparing vegetarian meals and initiating discussions about sustainability, abstaining from social media, incorporating meditation into daily routines, or prioritising waste reduction and practices such as “plogging” (jogging while collecting litter). Some students have disseminated their learnings by offering related education and inspiring others, exemplified by visits to primary schools to discuss sustainability issues.

Participants are also encouraged to consider how the insights gained from their cognitive and experiential learnings can translate into an organisational context. This process is supported through visits to companies, where they engage in discussions and reflect on real-world cases alongside industry representatives. To date, the following organisations have participated: Sony, Duni, and Perstorp AB. During these visits, students have the opportunity to meet staff who are responsible for sustainability issues within their respective organisations. These people can provide a comprehensive understanding of the diverse aspects of sustainability their organisations must manage, and they also share their initiatives aimed at fostering inner development among employees. Students are invited to contribute their perspectives and ideas. In some cases, they are tasked with applying the IDGs to a practical case in the company they are visiting.

At the end of the course, participants present insights from their learnings and share their challenges at the “Sustainability Week”. This annual event is arranged by LU and Lund Municipality to showcase new, important sustainability work and ideas.

3.3.4. New Courses and Programs on Climate Change, Development and Society

In spring 2025, the Lund Master’s in “International Development and Management” (LUMID) launched a new course titled “The Development Practitioner”. The course focuses on the personal and interpersonal skills, values and attitudes required in development planning and

interventions in diverse organisational settings. It aims to enhance students' reflexive capacities and is designed around the five IDGs clusters.

In autumn 2025, LUCSUS launched a new two-year International Master's Program in "Climate Change and Society" (LUCAS), which will integrate diverse aspects of transformation and the IDGs into the program. LUCAS aims to give students the expertise they need to better-understand and act on societal climate challenges. In this context, one of the expected learning outcomes is to nurture their transformative qualities and skills (cognitive, emotional and relational). This will be achieved, among other things, by embedding IDG-related exercises—such as those from the *Teaching Toolbox for Societal Transitions* (<https://transitionmakers.nl/>)—to support inner development and self-reflection across all course modules.

3.3.5. Arts, Aesthetics and Existential Resilience

The faculty of Humanities has also increasingly engaged in the field of inner transformation for increasing wellbeing and sustainability across scales. Activities relate to undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD education on existential sustainability and existential resilience. Whilst the IDGs are not the focus, they are integrated into related lectures and seminars.

One recent example is the course "Arts, Aesthetics and Existential Resilience", which is offered by the Department for Arts and Cultural Sciences, in cooperation with the Medical Faculty (Centre for Medical Humanities) and the Social Science Faculty (LUCSUS). It ran for the first time in 2025, and it is open to all students at LU.

The course provides students with a theoretical understanding and practical, embodied knowledge of how the arts and aesthetics can be a resource for fostering existential resilience. "Existential resilience" is here understood as an intrinsic human need and ability, to create and experience meaningfulness, beauty, connection, and compassion for ourselves, others and the world around us, in contexts of crises, loss and difficulties. This human ability lies at the core of arts and aesthetics, which therefore carry a potential to support existential resilience. Existential resilience is also central to the academic and professional fields of health and sustainability. Accordingly, the course is interdisciplinary, combining perspectives from the humanities with findings from research, education and practice in medicine, health and sustainability science.

The course discusses different sources of knowledge and practices that have the potential to support existential resilience. It covers topics such as aesthetic empathy and compassion, presence, sense-making, imagination and creativity, which form part of the IDG framework. It also explores how related capacities link to the individual, collective and planetary levels of human life. In this context, art-based approaches and IDG-related tools are introduced.

4. Student Career Services

LUSEM Career Services has also started to integrate the IDG framework into their work. This was inspired by the realisation that an increasing number of students want to work with sustainability in the future, but do not know how to approach it. The aim of the centre is to support them in the process of career planning, explore the job market and job search process, and identify their own capacities, motivation and values.

In this context, since the start of 2023 the IDG framework has been used for individual career coaching sessions, helping students to unlock meaningful and sustainable career development. It involves encouraging them to align their career goals with broader societal and environmental objectives, fostering a deeper sense of purpose and responsibility. A tangible example of this is the use of the diverse skills within the IDG framework to assess students' personal strengths and identify areas for growth. Around 800 individual career coaching meetings are conducted per year; whilst they are not all related to the IDGs, related needs, demands and advice have increased in recent years.

In addition to individual coaching, since 2023 the centre has offered a workshop series titled “Professional Skills Development”, which is based on the IDG framework. The workshops are open to all students at LUSEM and can accept 20–25 participants. The series is run two to three times per semester. During the workshops, participants are introduced to the IDG framework and engage in discussions on how internal transformation can influence their prospective careers. There are also practical exercises and structured reflections, grounded in the IDG Toolbox. The initial session involves activities aimed at cultivating self-awareness. In the subsequent workshops, participants explore their potential as change agents for sustainable development. For instance, they are presented with a case study illustrating a managerial dilemma: how to motivate decision-making aligned with sustainability principles despite inherent challenges? Working in small groups, they collaboratively analyse the case and identify which transformative capacities from the IDG framework would be essential in addressing such situations.

5. Staff Capacity Development and Strategic Collaboration

5.1. Leading in Complexity — Supporting Sustainable Collaboration and Leadership

Another section within LU that is increasingly engaging with the IDGs is the LU Collaboration Office, which falls under the “Research, Collaboration, and Innovation” division. It brings together employees with diverse academic backgrounds and expertise in collaboration, project management, and communication. The division supports the university in the development of strategic partnerships and collaboration platforms both internally and externally. Working on behalf of the university's management, the team serves as a gateway to regions, municipalities, businesses, interest organisations, and research funders seeking to engage in large-scale projects and initiatives.

Driven by staff members — one of whom, Fariba Vaziri-Sani, also serves as an academic advisor to the IDGs — the LU Collaboration Office began its active engagement in 2022. It started with an introductory presentation at a retreat meeting, where staff explored the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their connection to the IDGs. As part of this session, the IDG movie was screened, sparking meaningful reflections. Encouraged by the division head, staff members have since participated in the IDG Summits in Stockholm, followed by sharing insights and experiences with colleagues at departmental meetings. These experiences have deepened interest and increased willingness to integrate related principles into the division's work.

As a first step, staff members have been asked to prepare and launch a study circle titled “Leading in Complexity — IDGs as a Support for Sustainable Collaboration and Leadership”, which was launched in mid-2025. The study circle aims to develop and expand the interest in

IDG within the division, LU and beyond. Participants are introduced to the IDG framework, with a particular focus on the “Collaboration dimension”, exploring how the cultivation of inner leadership skills and collaborative capacities can contribute to the transformational shifts needed in today’s world. In addition, it involves practical exercises and reflective group discussions, enabling participants to apply insights to their professional contexts.

The circle has been developed within a broader learning initiative that included other study circles on themes such as “Appreciative Inquiry” and “Open Space — A Co-Creative Meeting Space”. Through this initiative, the division seeks to foster openness, trust and inclusive dialogue, cultivating a sustainable and transformative approach to collaboration. The long-term ambition is to deepen the integration of IDG principles within the division, engage in IDG-related activities such as local IDG-HUBs, and contribute to related collaborative initiatives at LU and beyond, to ultimately support more sustainable collaboration and leadership.

This ambition and vision, backed by the Head of the LU Collaboration Office, also led to the launch of a new strategic partnership on existential resilience and sustainability at the end of 2025. The collaboration involves the Social Science Faculty (particularly LUCSUS), the Church of Sweden, and several other actors to advance both institutionalization and impact-oriented work. The partnership has been formally integrated into the Collaboration Office’s operational plan, ensuring effective implementation and sustained long-term engagement. As part of this effort, two staff members from the LU Collaboration Office are participating in the IDG Ambassador Program, with LU covering the associated costs, to gain relevant knowledge and practical experience.

5.2. LU Strategic Collaboration Initiatives with Internal and External Stakeholders

LU provides financing for strategic collaboration initiatives that explore the link between inner development, collective and planetary wellbeing and sustainability. One of the university’s tasks is to help to address major societal challenges. This requires broad interdisciplinary collaboration both within academia and with external organisations. Against this background, LU is supporting strategic collaboration initiatives that aim to create meeting places for knowledge development and engagement in selected areas. All of these initiatives are interdisciplinary, involving researchers from multiple faculties as well as external partners based in Sweden and globally. In this context, LU has, for example, selected the “Relentless Existential Threats” project (2023–2024) and the “Existential Resilience” collaboration initiative ERiCi (2023–2025) for funding (cf. Malmström, 2023; Stålbrand et al., 2025).

ERiCi has led to the development of new educational programs (see Section 3.6), research initiatives, and ongoing partnerships. It brings together a broad range of actors from within and beyond academia to support individual, collective and planetary wellbeing, particularly in the context of education and health. It focuses on how to prevent and address the increase in existential and work-related stress among people working in healthcare, other service professions, and society at large. In this context, the aim is to explore how contemplation, aesthetics and compassion, aspects that form part of the IDG framework, can help counter stress and feelings of meaninglessness, and promote a more meaningful, sustainable life.

In today’s society, people whose work involves helping and supporting others are severely affected by increasing existential threats and associated stress. This is often related to feelings of meaninglessness and disconnection from self, the wider community and the world as a whole.

Apart from human suffering, stress-related mental illness is also costly for society, for example in terms of sick leave. Against this background, existential resilience can be understood as uniting outer and inner sustainability, for instance by nurturing intrinsic human capacities to cope with and overcome existential crises. At the core of these capacities is the ability to experience and understand oneself as part of the larger community – both human and ecological – and ultimately the interdependency and entanglement of personal, collective and planetary wellbeing. Existential resilience thus brings together personal and societal development; it is about fostering ways to find meaning and beauty in life, even when it is difficult, and to recognise one's role and agency in promoting sustainability in both personal and professional life.

External practice partners include governmental and non-profit actors from Sweden and Denmark, including the City of Lund, Region Skåne, ARNA-Art and Nature, the Biosphere reserve Storkriket, Konstfrämjandet Skåne, Lunds Fontänhus, Musik i Syd, the National Centre for Arts and Mental Health, Denmark, Sisters Hope, Denmark, and the Church of Sweden.

As the initiative has unfolded, many partners have offered seminars and workshops. For example, the Church of Sweden ran a session dedicated to the IDGs and the IDG Toolbox and described how the toolbox has been adopted by the church in their recent publication titled *The human factor* (Repka et al., 2024). In this publication, the IDGs are used as a framework to communicate the importance of Christian values in religious, secular and scientific spaces. It is argued that this framework can create a shared language and understanding for collaboration on critical issues and sustainability challenges such as climate change and social justice.

5.5.3. Train the Trainers for Transformative Education and Research

Through support from LU leadership, the ERiCi initiative received follow-up funding via the *Strategy for Cultural Collaboration 2018–2026* to develop a new capacity-building course for LU staff. The course explores how teaching and research can engage more deeply with societal needs by drawing on artistic practices and related inner processes and approaches, including the IDGs. Its aim is to foster perspective-shifting knowledge, learning, and experiences that ultimately support well-being and sustainability.

6. The Working Environment and Wellbeing

Other initiatives at administration, policy and leadership levels seek to explore the issues of inner transformation, and the use of the IDGs for accelerating wellbeing and sustainability across scales. Here, the focus is on discussions about how to integrate inner capacities, such as the IDGs, and develop new policies to improve the working environment of staff.

LU staff with experience in this field have, for instance, been invited to advise on a new merits project, which aims to offer recommendations regarding how merit and qualifications should be defined when making teaching position appointments. The project's mandate emphasises that the merit model should focus on competencies in research, teaching, collaboration and leadership, as well as the capacity of staff to contribute to a positive working and learning environment.

In this context, it explores which qualifications and inner capacities applicants can, or should, demonstrate, and how recruitment committees should evaluate them. Accordingly, the project proposes a shift in understanding—it argues that “merits” should be understood as evidence of

both qualifications and inner, transformative capacities. When its work is complete, the project will provide recommendations regarding support materials tailored to different stakeholders, such as teaching nomination committees, external experts and applicants.

7. Scientific Knowledge Development

Over the past 10 years, approximately 50 scientific articles, book chapters, and policy reports have been published under the Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program (see www.contemplative-sustainable-futures.com/general-3-1, e.g., Ives et al., 2023; Wamsler et al., 2020, 2021; Wamsler, Mulligan et al., 2022; Wamsler, Osberg et al., 2022, Wamsler, Osberg et al., 2024; Wamsler and Bristow, 2022; Woiwode et al., 2021;). These publications have significantly advanced the field and have been widely adopted internationally by scholars, practitioners, and key policy stakeholders (e.g., UNDP, IPCC, IPBES, the Club of Rome). Related research involved investigating some of the above-presented courses, including the “Sustainability and Inner Transformation” course (see Section 3). These evaluations generate valuable insights into the long-term benefits of integrating inner dimensions into educational activities and sustainability across individual, collective and system levels. Other research included assessments of IDG-focused education and leadership courses offered by private sector and non-profit organisations, leading to theory and guidance on how to design courses that integrate inner and outer dimensions for accelerating sustainability and the achievement of the SDGs (Bell et al., 2023; Ramstetter & Wamsler, 2023; Wamsler, Osberg et al., 2024).

Other departments and faculties are increasingly engaged in research and collaborative projects aimed at exploring how inner transformative capacities, such as the IDGs, can be effectively integrated into education at all levels—from schools to universities. Examples include the aforementioned ERiCi project and three ERASMUS+ initiatives, CLARITY, PhilosophyGyms, and ALIGN. The CLARITY project (2023–2026) is a transformative initiative that reimagines climate resilience education for children and young people. By operationalizing the GreenComp Framework, the project emphasises the need to support transformative capacities, ensuring that climate education extends beyond factual knowledge to include emotional resilience, creativity and ecological connectedness (Wamsler, Simon et al., 2024). CLARITY has developed a practical, ready-to-use Educators’ Toolbox, which also makes reference to some of the IDG Toolbox exercises (Simon et al. 2025). The PhilosophyGyms project (2024–2027), which includes the IDG initiative as a cooperating partner, focuses on co-developing integrated leadership development with and for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Ilcheva et al., 2025). ALIGN, which began in 2025, is closely connected to the global “University Coalition for Student Inner Development” for societal transformation (see Section 8.1).

Across most disciplines, research interest and engagement in existential sustainability, inner transformation, transformative capacities and the IDGs seems to be increasing, extending to fields such as urban planning, governance, politics, theology, philosophy, health, palliative care, ethics, and law.

8. Large-scale Networking, Outreach and Impact Work

8.1. The International University Coalition for Student Inner Development

Over time, IDG-related engagement has expanded far beyond LU, influencing change in educational narratives, discourses and approaches. Since 2024, LUCSUS has, for example, co-

created the global “University Coalition for Student Inner Development” (www.universityinnerdevelopment.org), initiated by the IDG Foundation and Rflect (www.rflect.ch). The Coalition brings together pioneering universities—including LU (Sweden), NTNU (Norway), Esade Business School (Spain) and the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands). The aim is to structurally embed inner development into higher education to accelerate wellbeing and sustainability. The long-term goal is to ensure that every student graduates with a lifelong habit of inner development, empowering them to sustainably address today’s increasing and intertwined societal crises.

The activities of the Coalition include the development of scalable, inter-curricular approaches that build the essential inner capacities needed to tackle today’s global challenges. They includes creating shared learning formats, supporting curriculum reform processes, and developing open-source impact measurement tools.

In 2025, the Coalition launched its first jointly-implemented activity, an online training. In addition, it secured funding for its continued work by successfully developing an Erasmus+ project proposal (ALIGN), which was awarded and commenced in October 2025, with LUCSUS serving as the project coordinator.

8.2. Outreach and Impact through Cooperation with External Key Players

In recent years, network and outreach activities related to inner development and the IDGs for accelerating sustainability have increased substantially, particularly in the context of existing research projects and the Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program (see also Sections 2 and 7). They include Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with organisations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and its Conscious Food Systems Alliance (CoFSA), the Inner Green Deal, and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

In addition, LU collaborates closely on activities related to the planned Science Centre in Lund. The Centre is currently being developed by Science Village Scandinavia AB, and is jointly owned by LU, Lund Municipality, and the Region of Skåne. The idea is to launch a long-term collaboration that aims to systematically integrate the IDGs into all internal and external operations, and educational activities.

Once all of the relevant agreements have been finalised, the planned Science Centre will be built. Covering an area of 7,000 m², people of all ages will be able to explore and learn about science and technology through interactive exhibits, demonstrations, creative workshops and other engaging activities. Over 200,000 visitors are expected annually from all sectors of society, including schoolchildren, families, businesses, the public sector and academia. The purpose of the Centre is to facilitate life-long learning for a sustainable future, and to invite people from all walks of life to learn about and engage with research and development in the region.

As sustainability is the overarching theme, addressing the link between inner and outer dimensions and transformation is key. The intention is to systematically integrate both the IDGs and the SDGs into internal management activities and the Centre’s operations from the start, making it a showcase for how to develop and run a sustainable organisation.

Together with partners from education, public and business sectors, the Science Centre team will create exhibitions and educational activities that integrate the SDGs; at the same time, the IDGs will guide engagement, by inviting visitors to feel, learn, do and act, linking minds, hearts and hands.

The Science Centre will include large exhibition and event areas, a planetarium, restaurants and an auditorium. Different areas within the building will be designed to inspire and engage with the five IDG dimensions (being, thinking, relating, collaborating and acting) and related aspects of sustainability. In their role as Senior Scientific Advisor for Sustainability, LUCSUS Professor Wamsler will be the scientific link between the Science Centre and LU, providing guidance and advice regarding the aforementioned activities.

9. Discussion and Conclusions: From Individual Engagement to Pilots, Institutionalisation and Lasting Impact

This case study highlights the following developments, processes and outcomes from working with the IDGs and inner-outer transformation for sustainability:

1. **Increased engagement across disciplines and levels:** In recent years, LU has increased both its implicit and explicit engagement with the IDGs across various disciplines, faculties and cross-faculty management divisions. This reflects a growing recognition of the importance of integrating inner development with sustainability efforts throughout the institution.
2. **Emerging themes:** LU's engagement with the IDGs has emerged in relation to a variety of concepts and themes, including inner transformation, existential resilience, existential sustainability, existential health, leadership development, self-leadership, career development, medical humanities, aesthetics, psychological resilience and wellbeing. This demonstrates the university's wide-ranging approach to incorporating the IDGs into its sustainability efforts.
3. **Growth from individual efforts to institutional change:** Many of the described initiatives began with courageous individual champions and small-scale pilots, but they are now expanding into larger, interconnected efforts. Many of the presented activities today also involve the initiators of other initiatives, making them increasingly interconnected. This allows for continuous learning, networking and the emergence of ripple effects, both within and beyond LU.
4. **Part of a larger movement:** The presented initiatives at LU can be seen as being part of, and contributing to, a global movement that links inner transformation with sustainability. This positions LU as a key player in advancing sustainability through integrated inner, behavioural, collective and system transformation. Work at LU has been pivotal in advancing research in this area, leading to wide-ranging impacts.
5. **Ripple effects:** Some of the outcomes and impacts of the presented initiatives include the development of innovative courses and methodologies by other academic institutions, private companies and non-profits, to explore inner dimensions as a key element of sustainability work and education (cf. Janss et al., 2023; Lewis et al., 2024; Mehlman et al., 2025; Simon et al., 2025). There is also increasing recognition of the field by global key players such as the Club of Rome, UNDP, IPCC and IPBES (cf. Bristow et al. 2024; IPCC, 2022a,b, IPBES, 2024; Legrand et al., 2022).

6. **Ongoing research, monitoring and evaluation:** Continued research is crucial to understanding the long-term impacts of the presented initiatives. Monitoring and evaluation will help refine the approach to supporting inner and outer transformation processes through research, education, collaboration and outreach activities.
7. **High-level policy support, continuous financing and commitment:** LU has made significant strides in linking inner and outer transformation to accelerate sustainability, but there is still much to learn and institutionalise to fully integrate these dimensions across the university and beyond. High-level policy support, continuous financing and commitment are required to support new activities, advance the crosslinking of existing initiatives, and ensure the systematic institutionalisation that is needed to address today's polycrisis.

Each year, new initiatives are launched, forming part of an emerging movement which lies at the nexus of transformative education, research and social change that is based on building a more conscious society. As scholars, researchers and educators, we can choose how we position our work with respect to (neoliberal) institutional norms, growing worldwide resistance to these norms, and more integral approaches. The field of integrated inner-outer transformation for sustainability remains underexplored, but it is highly relevant for the achievement of all of the SDGs, particularly the global education goal (SDG 4) that aims to ensure that all learners are capable of contributing to sustainable development (Target 4.7).

The notions of interconnectedness and individuals as active change agents are by no means widely accepted—in fact, they conflict with some dominant belief systems and worldviews (Leichenko & O'Brien, 2024; Ives et al., 2023). They represent, in themselves, a fundamental challenge, calling for transformative learning and a questioning of values and commonly held assumptions about human–environment relationships (Ives et al., 2017; Wamsler, Osberg et al., 2022). Related approaches, however, are not always easy to pursue within current learning and research environments. Deliberate transformation calls for deeper inquiry into current meaning-making mechanisms, not only within society, but also within our education, research, and university structures themselves.

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Declaration Statements

Conflict of Interest

The author reports no conflict of interest.

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Data Availability

No dataset is associated with this chapter.

Ethical Statement

The authors confirm that they have obtained the necessary permissions from their respective universities, that is: the staff involved in the mentioned initiatives, to publish the case studies included in this manuscript.

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